

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-25

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DRAFTED BY NEA/ARN:WNHOWELL:NEA:ARDAY
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 023038

EXDIS - FOR AMBASSADOR FROM ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, LE, US

SUBJECT: SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: (A) JIDDA 0766; (B) STATE 20960

1. FYI: THE ISRAELI CONCERN ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF SYRIAN TROOPS AS CLOSE TO THE ISRAELI BORDER AS NABATIYAH IS A VERY REAL ONE THAT GOES BACK WELL BEFORE THIS CURRENT FLARE-UP. THE ISRAELIS SEE THE SYRIAN MOVEMENT AS CREATING A NEW AND POTENTIALLY PERMANENT SHIFT IN MILITARY DISPOSITIONS THAT CONSTITUTES A SECURITY PROBLEM FOR THEM AND A POSSIBLE LONGER-RANGE STRATEGIC PROBLEM. THEY APPEAR PREPARED, IF NECESSARY, TO LIVE WITH UNRESTRICTED PALESTINIAN ACTIVITY IN THE AREA INDEFINITELY, PENDING THE
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ULTIMATE DEPLOYMENT THERE OF LEBANESE FORCES, RATHER THAN ACQUIESCE IN THE PRESENCE OF SYRIAN OR PROBABLY OTHER NON-LEBANESE FORCES THERE.

2. AT AN EARLIER STAGE WE SUGGESTED THE POSSIBILITY OF NON-SYRIAN ASF UNITS BEING USED IN THE SOUTH BUT THE IDEA WAS NOT PICKED UP BY EITHER SIDE. ACCORDING TO SOME

REPORTS, THE ASF UNITS IN THE NABATIYAH AREA MAY INCLUDE SOME NON-SYRIAN TROOPS, BUT WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION. END FYI.

3. PALESTINIANS REMAIN IN NABATIYAH AREA AND ELSEWHERE IN SOUTH LEBANON IN SUBSTANTIAL FORCE AND THEY HAVE WITHDRAWN MUCH OF THEIR HEAVY WEAPONRY FROM BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE INTO THE SOUTH. HOWEVER, THEY DO NOT, AT PRESENT, EXHIBIT AN INCLINATION TO RESUME CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITIES. THEIR FORCES REGULARLY EXCHANGE ARTILLERY AND SMALL ARMS FIRE WITH MILITIAS OF CHRISTIAN BORDER VILLAGES-SOME OF WHICH BENEFIT FROM ISRAELI SUPPLIES AND OCCASIONAL ARTILLERY SUPPORT. THE CHRISTIAN FORCES HAVE RECENTLY BEEN FAIRLY AGGRESSIVE BUT DO NOT APPEAR CAPABLE OF TAKING AND HOLDING MAJOR PALESTINIAN-MUSLIM ENCLAVES. GOL PRESTIGE HAS SUFFERED FROM ITS INABILITY TO EXERT ITS AUTHORITY OVER THE SOUTHERN QUARTER OF THE COUNTRY AND THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT THE GOL, CONCERNED BY THE GENERAL STATE OF LAWLESSNESS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH, CONCURS IN THE RECENT DEPLOYMENT OF ASF ELEMENTS AROUND NABATIYAH.

4. IN YOUR DISCUSSION OF ISSUE WITH PRINCE SAUD OR OTHER APPROPRIATE SAUDI OFFICIALS, YOU MAY DRAW ON PARA. 3 ABOVE AS WELL AS USING TALKING POINTS CONTAINED REFTEL B. YOU MAY NOTE THAT THE ISRAELIS HAVE PUBLICLY INDICATED THEIR DESIRE FOR A DIPLOMATIC RESOLUTION OF THE APPARENT IMPASSE AND WE ARE CONTINUING TO EXERT OUR BEST EFFORTS QUIETLY TO HELP THE PARTIES ACHIEVE A RESOLUTION THAT WILL PREVENT A CRISIS WHICH WOULD SERVE NO ONE'S INTEREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE PRESENT TIME.

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